# ART WORKOUTS
# (2012 - 2015)

ART WORKOUTS

Margit Galanter

# Interviews & Conversations

## Abby Margit New-Old Time Interview

## October 2012

***ABBY:*** **Margit, in the time I have known you (19 years!), it seems as if you have experimented with various movements towards or away from the heart of the machinations of the art world. In your perception, how have these choices impacted the tone, aesthetic,**

**scope and development of your work? Would you say that these choices sprang primarily from an aesthetic leaning, or rather from concerns and desires about quality of life, values, etc.? How do your choices of mentors and teachers, i.e., the art making lineage you have placed yourself within, impact and influence these predilections? How have these choices prepared or not prepared you for the economic landscape of art making today?**

**Perhaps more importantly to the questions art workouts is currently engaged with, in light of all of this, can you speak a bit about the way that time as functioned as you have moved closer and further away from the center of the art machine? How does this interface with body time, life rhythms, the art itself, etc?**

***MARGIT:*** I love the questions you are asking, so I'm going to leave them there in full and see what they spark. There are so many aspects to time and performance, some quite obvious, and others subtler, yet what you ask me brings up the fact that performative constructs seem to somehow mix time, itself. One works with material in some fashion and it is as if it extrudes from the past in through an alchemized present. We are drawing from – either a response to an incredibly recent action (in improvisationally-based work), or from memory, from bodily-memory, from the distortions of memory. And in fact it is the unique ways we distort that make the work its own. In one way, what matters is *to what extent* does the material and the enactment mix time, what is the unique blend?

I have had many art mentors over the years who are undeniably dedicated to their craft – from fields that span realms like

dance, somatic research, and movement meditation – what they all have in common is that through enacting a life of research, their perspectives are truly unique. In this way, art certainly feeds life and the converse as well. This says something about time, about the time it takes to practice in depth, about the span of a life, and also helps me to remind me of its importance; the larger modern society is not in support of these investigations in any obvious mainstream ways, so it requires commitment and fascination. And to practice, one has to very obviously make space and time, which are more easefully composed with support. So, the movement research in fact paves the way of a life.

My art-making life began a new chapter in 2003. This was the year my mom passed away. Through the experience of the intimacy of her dying, a series of artistic streams arose, some of which continue today. The first project, ***The Whole (W)hole***, was an originary myth as well as a story of embodied research at that time. I started over somehow, in a commitment to art as a thing to be made in concordance with being followed, which indeed was a commitment to living *in time* yet not buying into linear time. In that era of my life, my art practice involved sometimes doing in front of audiences but I didn't feel that it was "performance"- the word felt limiting.

The fact that my dance and somatic life prepared me to care for my mother which in turn offered me the seeds for my ongoing dance research, taught me that time is indeed tricking us and that dance's functions extend well beyond the frame. Old images can become more alive through living. Time moved on its head. Ideas

arose out of the intense cauldron of human interaction and then changed and changed and changed, like a kind of alchemy. And it was in no way linear. Projects emerged and embedded underground for years, ideas lay dormant and then intermixed with someone else's. It's like this — a total mess and arising out of it gleaming nuggets of composition, guided by the rich and unwieldy conditions of life.

Lineage: it is a line, and like a river, it flows in wildly varied territories, patterned through the conditions of living and motion. There is a deep connection to time here, but they are not the same thing. Forms change through the lived experience. *Time as a stream of life.*

For me, art needs to fulfill a coherency for it to matter - what that means is in my art practice needs to speak to my aesthetic sense, physical health, politics, spiritual inquiry, and my intellectual fascinations, all. I think this stems from my responses as a younger person to the reductionism of being "a dancer," that being a dancer early on somehow precluded me from some very live discourse, and at an early age I recognized this and refused to participate in the limitation and in doing so needed to expand my definitions and practices, (and took on rebellion and punk attitudes that indeed have their own baggage!). I didn't understand just dancing and not being involved with the making of the context, the ideas behind it all — the parts that form the whole. I felt that the good stuff happened in little enclaves, somehow like mystery schools, developing ideas and a unique language, but the depths of these kinds of understanding weren't making it into the public, how people talked about art,

wrote about art, and sometimes even what was and is seen in performance. I wanted there to be Access. I don't think I was alone and I think that artistic cultures are in constant flux and response. As a younger adult, in love with moving and dance, I felt to be at some kind of deficit and I have been driven throughout my investigations to be a part of shifting whatever the complex of this box was to me. It is my own drive, and a part of my politics. Could dance free itself into art and life and language, so the mind could live through the whole being, its native inheritance? This view was inspired by realms such as hybrid performance, ritual, activism, intercultural dialogue, somatics, sensory-perceptual research, club dancing, and homespun philosophy. I made my own contexts in coalition with others, over and over.

And time can literally suspend itself. I experienced once a coherency of time after intense practice with one of my teachers, Suprapto Suryodarmo, in Java, Indonesia. There was one moment I could feel all of time live in a single space, and in that state I experienced myself both fully still and glistening with life- hard to describe it. Then I watched the state unfold over the next few months, and see how it lives with me today. *Time suspended, time rushed*. In this work, we experienced practices that opened up time, merged aspects of disciplines, and expanded scopes of art and life. Cross-cultural practice indeed offered me insight into how my sense of time and space was constructed, and the embodiment of this particular constellation of movement meditation broke through some of the ridiculous mental constructions in the definitions of 'art' and 'dance' that I had inherited and

unconsciously held onto.  Through my studies with Prapto, I was able to feel the breadth of what movement art could do, how the material of movement was a bud for whole views on life and art, and could contain ones politics and beliefs and artistry to blossom and crumble simultaneously. How you do it matters.  Where you do it matters. All the pieces effect the whole.

Some arms of my art practice these days have been eking more into the frame of Art World than previously. This is in part due to working with you, and also perhaps the nature of the times; this interest in theatrical contexts is connected to my being willing to watch high art and see the power of working within a context that honors rigor and artistic/aesthetic practice, and in seeing work that is so incredibly inspiring in this Art frame from time to time. I like to get lost in large theaters with a group of people when the work moves me. It seems to be that forces and limitations can help to form things, like how a pearl or diamond is made from conditions and pressure.  On some level I could care less about the Art World – I am interested in the work, in the people who make the work, in the ways we receive and it is received and integrated – and yet, whatever the heck it is is a function and product of our societal constructs and a statement on a cultural set of values – economic, cultural and structural, and this matters, so I have to give a damn, to critique, to engage, or I will disengage, and therefore deny my interaction, which is basically naïve. We choose how we respond. What interests me is the engagement as a full-body one, complete with desire, disgust, thickness, fullness, life. Engaging is a process, one to practice

through living, through time. Disengagement with understanding is a composition, conscious or not.

***MARGIT:*** **What are the pressures that help you form and understand art? What are the underlying drives that are in your art-making processes these days? What are early facets of your dancing that still are present today? What has disappeared? What is it about TIME that is drawing you to work on it right now?**

***ABBY:*** *Wow I love your response. There is so much to think about! Thanks for the great questions. I think I will start with your last question about time. "What is it about time that is drawing you to work on it right now?"*

I am currently drawn to work that thinks about the category and experience of time because I have become increasingly aware of the ways in which my *understanding of* and *relationship to* time shapes the work that I make. This comes out of my own artistic practice, to be sure, but also through such books as Rebecca Schneider's brilliant *Performing Remains*, which has been somewhat of a paradigm-shifter for me.

Recently, in the process of making "What We Are Doing When We Remember What We Are Doing," I have been experimenting with the relatively simple and straightforward practice of naming a specific period of time a performance, at any given point during our rehearsal. These performances take many forms. Sometimes they are solo or duet performances which the other performers sit out and watch. Sometimes we move between being both the performers and our own audience. Sometimes we name a sequence of events a

performance only after the fact, to be watched only in the replay of our memories and discussions. Sometimes we invite a handful of people to come watch a portion of our rehearsal which we have named as performance. The limit of time and a change in category — from rehearsal to performance — is my only re-direction. We make no attempt to alter the content or tone of what we are doing to render it more viewer-worthy. We do not stage or rework material to "improve" the quality of these performances. So far, each time we have done this, the performances have been as interesting to me as anything else we have worked to construct or orchestrate. They are unquestionably performances, and furthermore, they are performances that I want to see. I am thus intrigued by the repercussions instigated by such a simple negotiation of time. It seems to affect both our experience within and our perception of the performance, without changing its specific content. Through this process, the power of this simple tool of time has surprised me, and entices me to experiment further.

We are documenting each of these performances with a written text- sometimes during the performance itself, sometimes immediately after, and sometimes within the next one or two days. My original intent was to fashion a performance completely out of this written material of documentation. If art is a trace of its actions, then I wanted to present an artifact of the creative process that exposed the performances as only that—a trace. As we began to work in this way, my experience of time and its unwillingness to remain in the categories of present and past, almost immediately unraveled this plan. While a documentary text, at the moment of writing seemed to function as a simple

documentation of past events, when we began to work with these texts in ensuing rehearsals–when we re-performed them within the real time process of rehearsal;  time began to loop and weave.

REPORT THIS AD

Whereas previously, the process of "making" a performance in rehearsal to me has often seemed like it happens in instantaneous, or "be here now" time—through a perhaps idealized process of "being in the moment", in which actions are felt and experienced in the perceived lucidity of presence, I am now beginning to see this process instead as an inconsistent yet noticeable weaving of past and present time.  When we remember what happened in rehearsal and attempt to recreate it in order to " pick up where we left off", when we look at a video of an improvisation and re-enact it in order to fashion it into something repeatable and tangible, or when we engage in any other of a myriad of tools central to the process of constructing a dance that we will hold in our memories until the and during the act of performance—are we not diligently engaged in bringing the past into the present and also the future?

In the process of this piece,  through our continual documentation, and the use of these documentary texts as material, the specificities of the way that *the subjective nature of memory interfaces with past time and thus impacts the process of making*, is becoming legible to me.  Without exception, the documents of our "performances" seem to vary widely from account to account. Content that is central to one document is often completely omitted in another document.  Sentences that were in quotations as if they had been remembered perfectly, are also remembered

perfectly and recounted in quotations,  with a completely different sequence of words and content, by another person. Perhaps I shouldn’t be surprised by this, but I am.

Further, as the process continues, and I begin to ready the documentary texts for use in performance, I have found myself not only subconsciously,  but also intentionally editing what I choose to document.  I seem to eager to sacrifice accuracy in order to make the document flow better as a piece of text itself, or even at times to highlight one event and erase another.  As I have realized I am doing this, I have also begun to notice the extent to which the subjective and personal nature of each of our documentary practices are as much documentary of the perceptive and expressive predilections of each of us as authors, as they are of the events that have transpired. I read this realization as a proposal that, if past time is indeed woven into the process of making work, the action of this weaving is necessarily reflective of the subjective filter of each of the participants who are engaged in the processes of remembering and reenactment.  In this way, the material of the work itself is rendered incredibly unstable and mutable. This realization is to me both obvious and surprising.

The piece has this begun to emerge as a looping of events, recollection, re-enactment, and even reenactment of the re-enactments.  As we work with the material, it continually transforms and shifts. In response to this instability, and as a way to exaggerate and thus perhaps understand it,  I have begun to

fictionalize. I choose to remember and document *fictional* conversations and events, which I then work with as text for the piece. In this way, I am able to graphically reveal to myself the way that the happenings of our process are interwoven with my own projections, biases, insecurities, and aesthetic choices as I spin the materials in my consciousness during the process of "making the piece." As I have thus abandoned the pursuit of "true" documenting, in favor of this move to exaggerate the subjective and prescriptive nature of the documentation process, the piece has came into focus for me. The fictionalized document feels somehow more "true" to my experience of making the work, with its looping of time, memory and subjectivity than an attempt to render a "non-fiction" account.

Through this process, my relationship to time has begun to shift. Previously, my experience of time was often couched in terms of " body time" versus real time, or the time I wanted to take with something as opposed to how much time I had to do it in—I was constantly in struggle with it. Now, as I see the way that time can be used as a tool and employed as a construct and have a tangible relationship to the subjective nature of its interaction with memory and perception, time is becoming for me something to work and experiment with rather than something to struggle against. It's plasticity invites creative interaction. I am fascinated by the possibility of the suggestion that we cannot actually count on the interpersonal connection gained through memory of a shared experience even though an experience was shared, because the filters of our different perceptions and

memory process have the possibility of so graphically shaping exactly what the content of that memory is. The way that this interfaces with my experience of reality, and that this then impacts the process of making work, is incredibly interesting to me.

*Margit, I will answer the rest of the questions succinctly because my first answer was so long…*

**"What are the pressures that help you form and understand art? What are the underlying drives that are in your art-making processes these days?"**

A desire to make and see things that are in opposition to a culture of poorly made products, easy satisfaction, and quick fixes is a driving artistic pressure for me. I am interested in material that the audience must work with and engage with.

A desire to make and see things that truck in the intractable, messy, slow, and often sublime material of the body and embodied experience is a driving artistic pressure for me.

A desire to understand, expose, and then perhaps dismantle in order to present the possibility of reconfiguring the implicit structures of performance is an underlying drive. I am interested in unearthing the embedded assumptions and forms of performance, and then reworking them as a means to expand the form. I like it

when I see this happen in other peoples work, and find myself aiming to do this as well.

**"What are early facets of your dancing that still are present today? What has disappeared?"**

I seem to have a drive since childhood towards disorientation and dizziness that persists. The first dance I made, at age 14 ended with ten minutes of spinning in a circle, and much of my early movement practice consisted of hours spinning on a swing. I still find myself wanting to disorient myself through movement because my body seems to get smarter when I do that. I am continually reckoning with the nausea and dizziness of people that I work with in almost all of my performance work.

I also had an early love of repetitive movement that, after a long period of abandonment because a college composition teacher had drummed it out of me, has resurfaced in my work in the past few years. However even more recently, I can sense that I am beginning to move away from this a bit.

I would say that a desire to present something other than myself, or other than the performers I am working with has disappeared. This is not to say I am not interested in artifice, or that I believe in "authentic" performance, but that I have no desire to disguise the embodied subjectivity of the performers as they play with modes of performance in order to make them or myself appear " good " or skilled at what we do.

I am also completely bored by a pursuit of virtuosity and movement invention, which are things I was very invested in as a younger dancer.  Sometimes a foray into these things emerges as a part of a process and can be fun, but to me they are no longer anywhere near a driving reason to make or pursue artistic work.

*Margit, thanks for your questions!!!*

## October 30, 2011 (MG)

In thinking about the class I led last Monday at Art Workouts, questions at end:

I thought to myself, how to lead people through something that would offer them a sense of themselves, multi-sensorially? Building off the research questions that Abby and I are in as teachers and as co-conspirators in the experiment for this session, I let many of the ones between us so far enter into my construction of the class, and through our recent performance research in letting-it-go, I simultaneously let the preparation and the questions all go when I taught, and let it come from all the conditions that led up to making our environment be as it was in the room together. It is a mysterious thing to be-in-the-teaching-moment, to really let the people and the work we are doing together open up within myself so that I can somehow

be a curator for our collective ideas, like a filter with its own motor, some kind of glow-in-the-dark fish.

I worked with the question, how to continue with this desire to make a bridge from a multi-sensorial experience into the making? A way I thought to do this was both analogous and experiential: work with the sensation of skin (in many forms), and then work also with the skin as the thing which forms, as that magical organ that is a transmediation between interiority and exteriority (terms which are just signposts for the directions of attention?). We worked to effervesce our skin. We used our practice text found in the basement of Bookends in Florence, MA written the same year of the first Love-In at the Haight. Make skins get very alive as a surface and a place for interaction, and as a place to sense oneself. Then, with this waking up of its sensing itself (and of course all the other senses that interact with the haptic: vision, smell, proprioception, and on and on…..), we could maybe understand from this experience what form itself was, what it meant to contain, what it meant to compose the being in space and in environment. That to experience form would possibly teach us something about form and forming. I brought in a version of a friction dance off of a class I took with Karen Nelson at SFADI back in the 90's I do believe where my duet with River was revelatory. Bringing sense to the conversation when it started to feel like we could become talking heads. Work with the materials and make them ours, now, with love and respect from where they came, with honor for my teachers, and to the moment. All these tools I have had the pleasure of gathering over the years from so

many places in my movement practices where we deeply get into the sensation, the design, some outpoured here into the skin of Monday Night Art Workouts. It felt necessary at some point to explicitly bring in some aspects of the research of Lisa Nelson's Tuning, like if we didn't we would be missing the compositional key. So she arose.

D

There was this incredible paradox that came through in this felt analog of skin to performance skin (In my quests I have come to understand that all conscious embodied experiences have at least some paradoxes embedded into them). This time this one of waking up the skin as a surface shows how it is not really a separation at all..but more like a way to actually sense the inner and outer landscapes more fully, and as connected. Interpenetration. Intertextuality. Permeabilty. Body-as-environment.

When we watched one another, it was from having reversed and used our sense memory to restore our positions from the week before as a bridge. We let ourselves notice how we organized ourselves to listen. We reversed sides of this, and let it deteriorate. I used the questions that arose in out of the evening's discussions that were salient for what we were building together: from Milka's presentation about sense memory from her book report and reading, from Ali's infiltration of the relationship of sensation and place, and Mara's image of sensation as language, how I interpreted this as dub. And so many more bodies brilliance, what

the physical research of each Workout participant brought into the space.

Gratitude for everyone’s willingness to come along for the ride, for the 5-minute presentations. For the class that proceeded led by Abby to be a kind of foundation, and the years of our work here and how it is continuing to get richer.

So, if I had any questions as grist for the mill for the next class in the series, it would be: How do we get out of the way to support the participants to sense themselves? And how is this a bridge to an investigative view?  How to more explicitly research the sensations of the mind? How do we challenge ourselves to stay with the material already with us, to build deeply from the arc already starting? And how much to depart from all of this so we can offer a tapestry? Maybe the question is- what is the function of tapestry, and what is the function of bricolage? How is it worth exploring this skin to performance skin further? How do we take instructions from what the presentations of the students bring into the mix? How do we fully allow ourselves to be in a research together, as a fluorescent school of creatures?

Whole body.

# Abby and Margit Mutual Interview, September 2010

**Abby-**

**In the last series, we had the intention of finding theory that came from the performative and practice-based experience. What rose up was "the organic beast" – would you speak about this phenomenon and its roots and consequences?**

**Kiss, mg**

**Abby:** Well, as we began reading in the first session, we came upon some revelatory writings by contemporary philosopher Mark Johnson. He writes about contemporary findings in neuroscience and biology that support something which we, as movers, have known … the idea of embodied cognition. The idea that thought, perception and the creation of meaning are rooted in physical experience, and the acknowledgement of this by neuroscience (as the daughter of a scientist I am always relieved when there is science involved) kind of blew my mind. I suppose that, as a mover I had known this on some level all along, but I think I was still intellectually attached to the primacy of the mind as the decision maker of the body. My favorite movement scores were often the ones that either really engaged my mind, so that I could be intellectually active in the process, or the ones that " turned off" my mind, which I found fun but vague and ultimately somewhat useless, because if my mind was my primary guide, if I turned it off I really had no way of tracking my experience or being present or intelligent with it.

Meanwhile, we also read an article/interview on the autonomic nervous system from the brilliant work of maverick body pioneer Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. In it, she speaks about the enteric, parasympathetic, and sympathetic nervous systems. She reworks traditional biology and posits that the enteric nervous system (small intestine) functions not only as a digestive organ, but also is responsible for sensing the "rightness" or safety of a situation. She houses the sensing of self and ability to track moment to moment experience in the parasympathetic nervous system,

which is ordinarily deemed responsible for only involuntary bodily functions like breathing, heart functioning, and adrenal activity. She attributes the tracking of internal movement and energetic processes through the nervous system, as well as the ability to work in a goal or activity based way, to the sympathetic nervous system. In other words, she presents an embodied and experiential framework for a globally housed system for the body's thinking and functioning. In the same interview, she also talks about tuning in to the underlying drone of the nervous system …perhaps the bodies vibrational essence…

The combined impact of both of these texts really shifted our entire focus in the class; this was getting exciting. Where at first we had been talking a lot, looking at interesting artistic work and gleaning aesthetic and conceptual inspiration from it, and presenting a lot of complicated ideas for scores and dance-making, now we actually had an invitation to consider reworking our artistic project from the standpoint of a deeply embodied artistic practice. Frankly, I wasn't the least bit sure how to begin, and had some nervousness about what might emerge, but I was intrigued.

All of the sudden, instead of running around barking ideas and frameworks, we were lying on the floor in the dark, rolled in blankets for 45 minutes, hardly moving at all! A big shift was beginning in our working process. When we finally allowed space and time to listen to and tune into ourselves on a cellular level, time expanded and became irrelevant. Decisions became clearer. In

a way I like to think of it as taking out the middleman. No longer did we need to hire our brain to interpret for us, but could let our expression and choice-making arise directly from our embodied experience.

When we began working this way, people got more three-dimensional in the room. Choice-making was more intentional and interesting, and people stayed in their processes for much longer period of times. I remember Dustin made love to the wall once for a good 45 minutes….

We decided to call this way of working the "Organic Beast" as a way of sidestepping the implied aesthetic of the words "embodied", and circumventing the cultural embededness of the mind/body split.

The organic beast is awesome. She is often perverse and hideous, but simultaneously magical and beguiling. Conventions about timing, volume, and breadth of action seem irrelevant, and moreover are perhaps even exposed as feeble attempts by the conscious mind to confine experience within parameters that it finds easily tolerable, digestible, and non-threatening. The organic beast flouts convention by rendering it inapplicable.

What I also love about the organic beast, something that I think we only just began to access in our last session, is that if all experience is both perceived and interpreted (digested) through all systems of the body, then the attempt to produce a response or an action that is "real" is an irrelevant pursuit. If all systems of the body are working congruently, than all

choice-making is equally real.  This is incredibly freeing artistically, as the palate can thus expand to include a choice to mimic a campy top forty song as much as it can include a choice to lay on the floor and moan in a way that vibrates your first chakra.

This is an exciting place to work from!

Love, Abby

**Margit,**

**What about the embodied voice?  What does the organic beast have to say and how do we get her to say it?  How do we listen to her?**

**x, abby**

**Margit**: Pretty wild, but this is what came when you asked: my current organic beast is an internal moveable structure – as if wild reeds or living ropes. Please do not take the word "structure" to be in any way fixed, rather it breathes, and through the interaction of its braiding and moving, the beast provides support and power in my dancing. Its image is one of multiple overlapping helix/sinews, each with a potential for sound and color and quality. It has the potential to say many things, really dependent on the context and my actions.

In order to listen, I had to create the space for the image to emerge, a kind of slowing down by providing space, no matter what that speed of the action. Then, I dipped into the well. An image

came. It said: “space in the head” when I asked it how to listen to it – I could take this further and see what else the image asks for. This is just the beginning…. *

An embodied voice probably has something to do with a pre-lingual state. Not that it can’t come out in the form of words, in a legible meaning, but rather that it would emerge *from* sound: the grunts and groans. I recently learned that the way contemporary musician Justin Vernon (Bon Iver) came up with his wild and beautiful lyrics was to make the music first and accompany it with sounds, and then from these, the words came! They would form through the repetition of the inchoate and the tuning into what already had emerged. I love this as a process, as a way of listening and getting the unknown to speak.

I was interested in our last series about conversations we had around sounds and language. Particularly, in one of them, I was working with sharing a series of healing sounds that come from the lineage of *qigong*. In this practice, one is initiating sounds that have a history of use (what Wittgenstein would call *whole-use families*…) and by doing so invoke a harmonizing of a particular organ pair and meridian flow. Liver: “shiiiii,” green, branching, sprouting, and on. This is a process of cultivating through intention and action. In our conversation of class post-class, you talked about an experience you had had years before with the sounds and images that came through your dancing of liver (was this with Sarah Shelton Mann?) – not a predetermined set of operations, but rather, color, texture, movement arose… and this

seems close to one unique way to find an embodied voice – to source it from the imagination as it crosses with movement, seeing what comes and moving with *that*.

There are so many avenues, so hopefully this will arise for each individual in a unique formation and a unique set of utterances. And then by working together, we can also pick up influences from one another. As Eugene Gendlin states, "by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before."

Having just arrived back from a residency in Minneapolis, I noticed how your way of making sound has entered into my own practice, without consciousness, but rather once it came, I could recognize it – in the form of a rumbling sound in my gut that met the air through flapping lips, like the sound of a kid making an airplane. Soooo Abby! If I repeat this sound for a while, the beast reforms – so visceral, so whole body, a restart of sorts. Yesterday in the Milliken Studio in Minneapolis, I saw huge wings of a bird inscribed in the alterations of the tones of the bricks, so I traced them with my whole body and finger as pointer with pen. I stepped into the image, and become bird-like, became animal-with-pen. The airplane sound helped me recover some energy I didn't even know I had, so what was more hawk-like grew bigger into phoenix proportions through the power of the resonance of the tones. The only way to match its intensity in that moment was to write in the air and to take off my shirt and release some of the codes (which I guess is a word that means the habitual actions that I come to use in dancing). This is the power-potential of

listening to the organic beast – presence in practice, and whole-body action.

So far I have presented multiple sound embodiment possibilities: emergence through tuning and living in an unknowing, an intentional cultivation through repetition, imagery and practice; a wildly personal individual image that arises on its own; and the mystique of shared communication – the communal development of meaning.

I look forward to seeing what and how we take this further in the upcoming series, as we said this is when the work really begins to hum….

*One of the forms I use to engender this kind of knowing is Focusing, initiated by Eugene Gendlin. The image of helix/sinew allies with a piece of the dance lessons I got from Benoit LaChambre in his teachings at the SEEDS Festival|Earthdance this summer. Again, the more the crossing, the more novelty is possible.

## Margit & Abby Mutual Interview, April 2010

**MARGIT:** Abby, what are your current interests in your own performing right now?

**ABBY:** One of my interests in performing right now is about appreciating and exploring the power of the relationship that is created when there is an audience and a performer. Until just recently, i have been a performer who actually loved rehearsal much more than performing. I was ambivalent about the contract of watched/ watcher…Seeing and reading about Marina Abramovic's work lately has brought to my attention the idea that when you add an audience, the performer is suddenly offered an amazing amount of energy, power, and focus. Much of Abramovic's work deals directly with this energetic exchange. I think prior to seeing her work, I somewhat narcissistically felt as if there was something perverse about what happened when someone watched me on stage. When I was younger, I was able to get off on this in a sort of dark and twisted way. To me the audience seemed more of a voyeur watching my oh so intense journey than anything else…When I was working with Miguel on the piece " Everyone" Miguel came back from working with Deborah Hay and asked us to " allow ourselves to be seen" I struggled sooo much! I cried! I got angry and rebellious! My whole contract with the audience was, I think unconsciously, that I was not allowing the audience to see me, (but knew they were watching) but then would sometimes catch them ….Allowing myself to be seen took the erotic charge out of the relationship …it left me high and dry so to speak. This coincided with me reaching an age where I don't necessarily want people looking at me in bright light! If performance was about being watched, I wanted privacy, I wanted out! So i took a big old break from performing….

REPORT THIS AD

whoa. It is intense to write all that.

Realizing that the relationship to the audience in live performance is something magical that creates a magical, electric space, in this age when so many things arevirtual, is an astounding revelation to me. Performing feels like an entirely new experience, and something I want to be completely present for.

So then a second interest of mine right now in performing is how to make my entire self present at the moment of performance. How can the moment of performance be, not a performance, but an act of presence …..For me the beginning of this journey is about processing some dark shit and bringing it onto the stage, so that it becomes part of my performance experience. After a career of performing the role of "I am a dancer on stage, see what I can do?" I would like to present other aspects of my experience ….like rage!

thanks for asking.

**ABBY:** My question is "what are your interests in making work right now?"

**MARGIT:** Making work: what I love about this term is that it can be applied to so many different kinds of purposeful activities, be it the making of live art, of an object, of a field of study, of drumming up one's vocation. Making work seems to be about defining

something through the process of the doing; as you do, so you are becoming.

Making work: my fascinations always have a meta-component, and in the case of art, the question often comes up of why do it at all? There is so much struggle in there. A bunch of years ago I found the way to provide a regenerative answer to the nagging question. I pour my whole self into my art, consciously. What this means is, an artistic project necessarily need be fulfilling a variety of realms: artistic interests, a sense of design, intellectual curiosity, physical health, sensory development, soul practice, human connection, all. So, now my work comes when it is an integration of the total potency.  I don't push it, I see what arrives and follow It. When I can see how these aspects interact, I know I am in It. I am not sure what I am doing is art as much as it is me seeking, and bringing form to my imagination and to the invisible realms. Art is one word which can describe this, and there are others, but truth be told, I feel we need more accurate words to describe our practices. It is very satisfying to be a part of a field, and then there is this aspect that is just the doing. There is in me a part that does not necessarily want to join in. I am choosing to participate right now. It feels right. It moves *It* forward.

A big part of making work as a dance and performing artist is what it means to be visible, how I shape what I am doing for others to see, and how to be in the presence of others. This comes in so many phases from the inception of the work. In making, I am

deciding about a voice, a tone, and a way to be. On the level of performativity, my greatest concern is to see and be seen (scene) simultaneously. This is a vital challenge that is ongoing.

My pieces take many forms, be they straight-up dance experiments, writing, performance lectures, discussions, curatorial projects, and installation work.

My making work these days is a kind of slow build of ideas through the richness of a constellation of questions. I spend time alone investigating and as I can, I work side-by-side with people who inspire me to enliven and help give It form. I like what happens when making work lives in the presence of others. I like what happens to me, all the insight that can come from putting it out. My concern is to create a field of inquiry that can be shared. If it lives in a variety of settings, my expectation is that the contexts can provide another layer still for the work. So it effervesces (is that a word?) amongst its environment and people, developing its life from where it is at.

Right now, I am amidst a project called Y, which is a study of branching, of multiplicity. I am interested in the androgyne as potent characters and symbols of potentiality. The splitting of a cell is the stretching of a polarity to create division- this is the inception of multiplicity! This arrival from singular to more is a place of sex determination, and also an analogue for the rise of language. So, the letter Y has been a symbol both for the Word and the Androgyne, arms outstretched one body into two. You can

read a little more about the project at this site:http://margitg.wordpress.com/archive/y/

**MARGIT**: Now for you: What is something you would like to research in teaching the Monday Night Art Workouts?

**ABBY**: One thing that I am excited to research in the ART Workouts is how to integrate an intellectual and theoretical discourse into a class setting that also involves a rigorous and embodied physical practice.

I feel like back when we went to college (100 years ago), I received a very clear message that dance was one thing, and theory was another. It was assumed and accepted that visual art and filmmaking were deeply connected to theoretical discourse about art and art making, and even perhaps were crucial to it, but that dance fell into some shady and gauche netherworld that landed somewhere between the gym, anthropology, and MTV. I will never forget the reply of one of my esteemed colleagues who responded to my question of "why didn't you come see my show?" (he chose instead to sit in an east village bar, only blocks away). He replied, "I don't watch dance."

At the time, I was quick to nod knowingly, implying of course, how silly of me… dance is for girls and fairies, lets drink some scotch and talk about films…. I tried to study film, but it bored me to tears. I tried to study visual art, but had no talent for it…I read lots of critical theory, but felt like I somehow

wasn’t supposed to connect it to my own artistic journey with dance to this body of thinking.

Post- college I came out to the Bay Area, and kept dancing. At the time (1994) my experience here corroborated the supposition that dance making and critical theory had no use for each other. I plunged myself into the anarchic, polyamorous, angry, and expressive dance scene that was going on at the time. We talked about our relationships to ourselves, each other, the natural world, the universe, our womanhood, our energy, other peoples energy, homeless people, sex and sexuality, the impact of eating ice cream on our health, but never did anyone mention my beloved Donna Haraway, Roland Barthes, or Fredrick Jameson. In fact, if I tried to go there, people seemed annoyed, threatened, and perhaps even a little angry that I was trying to show off my expensive education.

So when I went to New York seven years later and began working with Miguel, imagine my surprise when one day, Miguel quoted Roland Barthes in rehearsal! Each time we entered a new process with him, he had spent time researching reading , scouring the crevices of the internet for ideas, theories, inspiration, and precedents…We went to Hollins for a residency one spring, and I happened to see the notes on the board left over from Donna Faye’s Choreography class. It read like and introductory course to Modern Culture and Media. Then I saw the work those girls were making. Oh my god! Genius! Earth changing! Something clicked in my brain. Good theory makes good Dance! But I was running too

fast –making it to rehearsal, going on tour, running a Pilates studio, and making babies… to do much about it at the time.

So anyhow, now I am back in the Bay Area, and things seem different. Lots of folks have gone to graduate school and I can see already that the dialogue has shifted a lot. This is exciting.

I am really working on integration at the moment. I am trying to connect pieces and aspects of experience.

So i think one of the theoretical projects for me of the ART WORKOUTS is to see if we can finally step out from under that ridiculous dichotomy of mind versus body, which i think as dancers we have always instantly recognized as bogus. I would like to start to really be able to be in a discourse about the nature of performance and reading and performing the body at the same time as we are working to deepen our experience as physical beings. That these things could be, at the least simultaneous and at the most, synonymous activities!! Live performance is radical. Embodied presence is radical!! Perhaps non-embodied presence is too for that matter!

I think you have been thinking this way for a while, but I am apparently a late bloomer….

*xo*

*abby*

**ABBY:**

pick your favorite

Can presence be taught?

What makes a performance compelling to you?

What does your ideal teacher look like and how does she impart her information?

Describe your ideal student. How will your teaching address the difference in backgrounds of the students?

Why are you interested in creating a class that has a cross-disciplinary dialogue embedded in its constituency?

**MARGIT:** I choose the question Can presence being taught?

First of all, I would say that presence is a state that one can experience through clear and embodied action. There is a component to presence that is having a layer of observation that comes with the clarity, and from this one can make choices and decisions that are aligned with one's values. In terms of performance – be it performance on stage or performance in one's actions in the world (e.g., having to speak effectively, making decisions in the moment) – a person is often faced with adrenaline and can cut off their full capacity. From Bonnie B. Cohen, I have learned that the sympathetic system, historically called fff (flight, fright, or freeze) also includes actions like tend and befriend. There are

physical practices that can show us how to live in embodied states, and recognize which of the multiple systems we are enacting at a given time. All this to say, when you have to perform, you may be limiting your options because you are scared. In a strange way, each action is life threatening, as it threatens your sense of self, and can change the direction of your life course, no matter how delicately small it is. Other roadblocks to being present are that you may also just not be focused on what you are doing, or be into what you are doing and not aware of what else is taking place around you.

This term presence is such an elusive one, so often stated, could use a universe of dialogue, and I think it is quite personal in definition. There is a larger social framework, as ever, that plays into a concept of presence. There are indeed tools that can incite being in the mode of presence, and I will address this later. I am not so into ideals, though the failures and attempts bring great information and clarity. I practice thinking from experience, as a way to find what I already know that need be more greatly articulated and therefore will come to know more fully, and to mend the mind/body division that we inherited, as movers and as citizens of Western Civilization influenced by Descartes. Since we thought therefore we were, some of us collectively have been in a long process of recovering becoming. With the division, we (and I know the “we” is loose; if there is any doubt, count my multiple selves) gained an obsession with quantity, diminishing contrast, pattern, and gestalt (thanks Gregory Bateson for the clarity here). So, I speak from this view of monism, the

constellation of connections and a wholistic or ecological approach. I do not want to create an illusion that there is this ideal thing, presence, and we try to get there. Trying is imbued with effort. There is always a step away.  One can practice presence, would this be presencing?

I bring up dualism because it is right there oftentimes when one is being seen. Oh, the pain of the separation! Buber spoke of I-Thou, and many lineages have terms to speak of these connections.  Eugene Gendlin coinsbody/environment, Philosophy of the Implicit. Presence is in some aspect about being in the connection, which I have called in the context of my own performance dancing, “dancing with”. You can substitute “being with, actingwith, playing with”. It is not so much about a duet, rather about being in the state of with-ness. I experience this with-ness as a body/environment, as a deep fascial movement, through my proprioception in relation to my own moving parts- in self and with. Without with, I am a spinning top, and as a dancer, I know that state place all-too-well. As a motor-mouth and a hothead, I know that state all-too-well! Practicing presence.

The funny thing about presence is you can practice and it may indeed emerge through practice, yet also it just arises, like gas, rises up through the surface, and maybe you happen to notice you are there. It can just come.

So, how does one teach presence? We can teach practicing presence. There are many tools that help the practice. They relate to physical intentions and attentions, and they relate also to

creating frameworks and initiations within an particular run of action. Practicing presence is supported by repetition from consciousness, from living in an action, observing it, and trying again. It seems important to slow down enough to match the movement with the attention as you get the presencing motor running. Really, with practice one can start to develop a context for what it means to be in an embodied noticing of action while it occurs. The noticing is strangely close to judging what one is doing, but realms away. What can take place is from this kind of layer of observation that you can make choices, rather than live in the spinning top.

**ABBY:** whoa, I love your response.  holy cow you are light years ahead of me!  That shit about  "when you have to perform, you may be limiting your options because you are scared, and in a strange way, each action is life threatening, as it threatens your sense of self, and can change the direction of your life course, no matter how delicately small it is."  Is a BIG DEAL!!!  that explains so much to me about the state of performing and how it can feel so astounding when one can actually be present through that state,  and equally how it can be so devastating when one feels like one loses track of oneself there!

This reminds me of some reading I have been doing about babies and brain development. On some level, as physiological response to performing is probably hardwired into our system from how we experienced trauma in early life. Infant brain research is showing that if the infant is traumatized during the earliest moments of

life, before they have much control of their nervous system or bodies, their response is often freezing,  or playing dead.  This may explain a bit the occasional freeze or blank that happens on stage…

A class that practices performing can, in this way, be like a model mugging class.  We can practice choice making and presence from within that adrenalized state.

**MARGIT:** And find tools to diminish the stress, so one's state can be clearer and more relaxed, with more space, more breathing. Stress has a function, but with practice and artful skill you can have choices in how you want to live through the moment.

## Prepping for CounterPULSE showing December 8, 2012

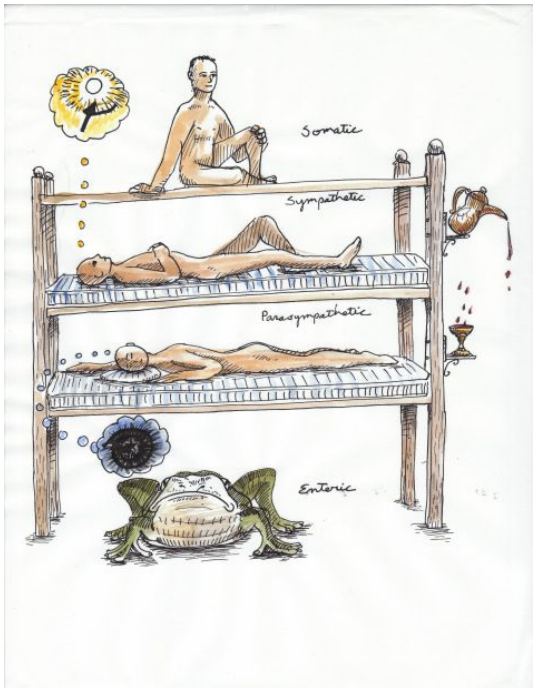
Hallie preparing the *set, no set*

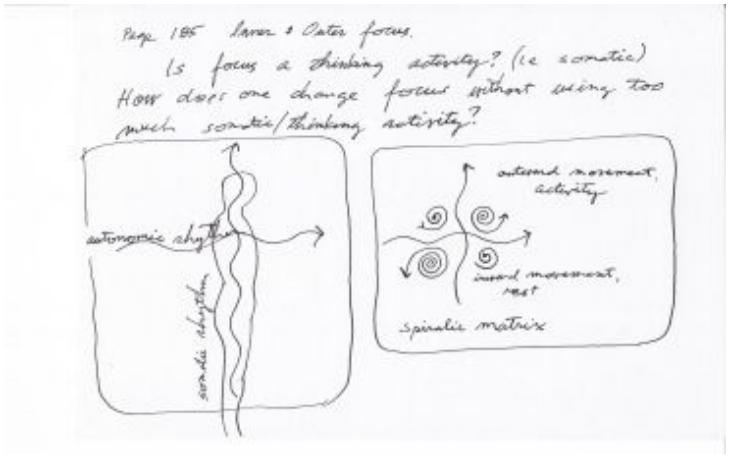
Mary and Mara braiding

Abby getting it *all* coordinated…

# MONDAY NIGHT ARTWORKOUTS #1

Charles Granich drew the following images based on one of the readings for our class, an interview between Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Lisa Nelson on the Autonomic Nervous System, in the 2008 edition of Sensing, Feeling, and Action.





Page 185 Inner & Outer focus.
Is focus a thinking activity? (ie somatic)
How does one change focus without using too much somatic/thinking activity?
autonomic rhythm
somatic rhythm
outward movement, activity
inward movement, rest
spiralic matrix